

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJ: LEFTIST-LED TRADE UNION PROTESTS

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS (UCTUO) STAGED A PROTEST RALLY IN COLOMBO DECEMBER 28. THE RALLY WAS ATTENDED BY AN ESTIMATED 5,000 TO 7,000 PERSONS. SEVERAL LEFTIST UNION LEADERS ADDRESSED THE VERY ORDERLY GATHERING. MOST OF THEM CALLED FOR THE WORKERS TO SUPPORT EFFORTS OF THE RALLY-SPONSORING UNIONS TO EXHIBIT WORKERS' DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS TO CUT FOOD RATIONS AND TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO MODIFY TRADE UNION REGULATIONS. THE CROWD WAS ORDERLY, LISTENED INTENTLY, AND DISPERSED IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF THE LAST SPEECH.

2. JCTUO LEADERS CONSIDER THE RALLY A SUCCESS AND HAVE SINCE HELD MEETINGS WITH LEADERS OF THE UNIONS WHICH SUPPORTED THE RALLY. THIS GROUP, WHICH COMPRISES REPRESENTATIVES OF VIRTUALLY ALL LEFTIST-LED TRADE UNIONS, IS PLANNING TO CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE STRIKE DATE HAS NOT BEEN DETERMINED.

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3. IN DISCUSSION JANUARY 16 LABOFF INFORMED BY ALAVI MOULANA, SLFP TRADE UNION LEADER AND MEMBER OF JCTUO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, THAT GROUP INTENDS TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO AROUSE WORKER OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS. HE WAS QUITE

RELUCTANT TO ESTIMATE DATES OF FUTURE RALLIES, AND ESPECIALLY SO REGARDING POSSIBLE DATE OF GENERAL STRIKE. THIS, AND OTHER COMMENTS OF HIS, LEFT IMPRESSION THAT DESPITE "SUCCESS" OF DECEMBER 28 RALLY, UNCERTAINTY FOSTERED BY MEMORY OF PAST LACK OF UNION MEMBERS' SUPPORT FOR STRIKE CALLS AND BY GOVERNMENT'S RECENT HARD-LINE RESPONSES TO TRADE UNION AGITATION CAUSE PROTEST-RALLY LEADERS TO TAKE A MORE CAUTIOUS APPROACH IN THEIR EFFORTS TO SHOW MILITANT OPPOSITION.

4. AN ARTICLE APPEARING IN JANUARY 20 EDITION OF FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW DESCRIBES DECEMBER 28 RALLY AND SOLIDARITY EXHIBITED BY SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS OF LEFTIST UNION LEADERS AS "A GENUINE CAUSE FOR SELF-CONGRATULATIONS." EMBASSY OPINION IS THAT WHILE THE ARTICLE IS FACTUALLY CORRECT, IT ACCORDS MORE SIGNIFICANCE TO THIS SHOW OF UNITY BY THE LEFTIST-LED UNIONS THAN IS JUSTIFIED.

5. THE AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE, MERVYN DE SILVA, WAS RECENTLY REPLACED AS EDITOR OF THE SRI LANKA SUNDAY TIMES. REPORTEDLY, HE WAS FIRED BECAUSE OF HIS CLOSE TIES AND CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENT, THUS, WE FEEL THAT THE ARTICLE MAY REFLECT PERSONAL SATISFACTION THAT ITS AUTHOR DERIVED FROM THE EVENTS UPON WHICH IT WAS BASED.

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WRIGGINS

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